

From: Jennifer Soldano [Jennifer.Soldano@txdmv.gov]
Sent: Friday, September 03, 2010 3:31 PM
To: DARS Contractor Deafness RS3a
Subject: Re: Driver's Education.

Ms. Bise:

Thank you for your email. Our department does not accredit driver's education classes. That is a function of the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The actual driver's license test is take at the Texas Department of Public Safety. The TEA's website contact information can be found at: <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/contacttea.aspx>.

Jennifer
Soldano Legal
Counsel
TxDMV
4000 Jackson Ave., Bldg. 1
Austin, TX 78731
Phone: 512-465-7595
Fax: 512-467-5909

>>> DARS Contractor Deafness RS3a <DeafnessRS3a@dars.state.tx.us> 9/3/2010 11:21 AM
>>> Dear Ms. Soldano,

I was referred to you by the Texas Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities, in hopes you can help me with a statewide dilemma, but I am contacting you on behalf of my consumers in the DFW area. I have had over 20 deaf consumers, American Sign Language (ASL) users, from the ages of 16 to 21 needing to access driver's education to obtain their driver's license per SB 1317. Before the bill passed, deaf individuals waited until the age of 18 to take driver's license test at their local DPS with accommodations, specifically a sign language interpreter; however, they are now required to attend a course prior to taking this driver's license test. This task has literally been impossible to do for a majority of the deaf across Texas.

On average, deaf individuals read and write anywhere from a third to fifth-grade level, due to the inability to hear a phonetic language that requires listening to phonemes and sounding out words to read. Most of our deaf consumes have never hear sounds or English, which makes the auditory language a second or third language for them. This why most deaf individuals are provided ASL interpreters in various settings as a means effective communication to have the same access as their hearing peers. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has greatly helped businesses and public entities to recognize the need for communication access, requiring them to provide equal access. However, for years we have noticed that deaf and hard of hearing individuals are not able to access and participate in driver's education and defensive driving courses.

We have been told numerous times by TEA, that deaf individuals can access the online courses; however, it has been difficult for most of my consumers due to the English barrier. We have been told by driver's education schools that the students can bring in a family member or try lip-reading. I have a consumer who is currently refused from participating in a course until he pays for the interpreters. This is not effective communication as required by the ADA.

Again, I am contacting you both for assistance to provide a resolution to this statewide problem. I have several ideas that could help resolve this issue, and would love the opportunity to meet with you to discuss them. We need to make these courses accessible for our deaf consumers to help them obtain transportation for jobs, child care and independence, because it is also the right thing to do for our deaf constituents in Texas.

Respectfully,

HEATHER BISE
Deafness Resource Specialist
Region 3A (Dallas Metroplex)
214-521-0407 Voice/TTY
214-295-9654 Video Phone
214-521-3658 Fax
advocacy@deafactioncentertexas.org (alternative email)

If we do not lay out ourselves in the service of mankind, whom should we serve? -John Adams

Funded by the Office for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services/DARS

Attention:
Heather Bise
Deafness Resource Specialist
Region 3A (Dallas Metroplex)
214-521-0407 Voice/TTY
214-295-9654 Video Phone

Dear Ms. Bise:

Thank you for contacting the Texas Education Agency. This message serves to acknowledge receipt of your email correspondence sent to TEA on September 3, 2010, as follows:

From: DARS Contractor Deafness RS3a [<mailto:DeafnessRS3a@dars.state.tx.us>]
Sent: Friday, September 03, 2010 10:44 AM
To: jennifer.soldano@tx.dmv.gov; DeVries, Norma
Cc: Dittfurth, Doug (DARS)
Subject: Driver's Education.

Your correspondence was forwarded to the Correspondence and Complaints Management Team, Office of the Commissioner for proper review and handling.

On review of your correspondence, it is my understanding that certain individuals age 16 to 21 of the deaf community may not be able to satisfy the requirements under Senate Bill 1317. You indicated that driver education courses or course providers licensed by TEA may not accommodate consumers who are deaf in a manner which provides them access and an opportunity to participate in the course, whether online, electronically, or in a class setting at no cost to the consumer.

We will forward your request and information to appropriate TEA staff for further review and response to you within the next 10 business days. In the meantime, if you have any questions regarding the TEA complaint process, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at (512) 463-9342 or email complaintsmanagement@tea.state.tx.us.

We appreciate you bringing your concerns to our attention.

Sincerely,
Emi Johnson

Ms. Emi Johnson, Director | Amy Rhames, Correspondence Manager
Texas Education Agency ? 1701 N. Congress Ave. ? Austin, TX 78701-1494
Main 512.463-9342 ? Fax 512.463.9008